

## NATO in Libya: Implications on the Future of the Alliance

by

Captain Timothy P. Sheridan  
United States Navy



United States Army War College  
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Captain Timothy P. Sheridan  
United States Navy

Colonel Charles W. VanBebber  
Project Adviser

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U.S. Army War College  
CARLISLE BARRACKS, PENNSYLVANIA 17013



## **ABSTRACT**

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## NATO IN LIBYA: IMPLICATIONS ON THE FUTURE OF THE ALLIANCE

I've worried openly about NATO turning into a two-tiered alliance: Between members who specialize in "soft" humanitarian, development, peacekeeping, and talking tasks, and those conducting the "hard" combat missions. Between those willing and able to pay the price and bear the burdens of alliance commitments, and those who enjoy the benefits of NATO membership – be they security guarantees or headquarters billets – but don't want to share the risks and the costs. This is no longer a hypothetical worry. We are there today. And it is unacceptable.

-Robert Gates<sup>1</sup>

NATO operations in Libya in 2011 exposed significant weaknesses in the alliance and highlighted a need to reevaluate NATO's future. Widely heralded as a success, NATO's eight month operation against the Qaddafi regime taxed NATO member nations' political will, financial resources and collective capabilities. U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, in a speech in Brussels shortly before he turned the job over to Secretary Leon Panetta, highlighted a considerable disparity in the ability and willingness of member nations to contribute, financially and operationally, to actions supporting interests considered by many NATO nations, as vital.

During U.S.-led Operation Odyssey Dawn in March, and later, Operation Unified Protector, as the NATO mission became known, daily NATO strikes continued through the summer with little discernable progress on the ground. As the weeks and months dragged on, schisms began to appear between participating NATO nations. Daily NATO kinetic missions often resulted in civilian collateral damage, eroding political support in many European nations and in the United States. As a result, in June, Norway pulled some supporting aircraft out of the operation, and Italian foreign minister, Franco Frattini, unilaterally called for a pause in the bombing to reevaluate the mission.

Additionally, initial operational planning exposed glaring capability gaps. It was quickly apparent that without American air-to-air refueling, intelligence reconnaissance and surveillance, electronic warfare and strategic lift assets, sustained air operations over Libya were impossible. In this environment of economic instability, diminishing resources and shrinking defense budgets in the NATO zone, the 2010 Lisbon Summit Initiatives called for significant capability enhancements and expanding NATO's role to include peace support, nation building and reconstruction. NATO's structures, attitudes and institutions, forged over 40 years of the Cold War have not evolved sufficiently since 1991 to efficiently and effectively operate in today's dynamic security environment composed of small scale hybrid conflicts in austere environments, non-state actors and asymmetric warfare. NATO operations in Libya through the summer of 2011 exposed this failure to adjust, calling into question NATO's utility and suitability in future conflicts.

### Background

NATO, established by the 1949 North Atlantic Treaty, was largely a reaction to the Berlin Blockade and the growing belligerence and formidable military might of the Soviet Union following World War II. Originally a twelve member security alliance<sup>2</sup> structured for large scale conventional military operations focused on the Soviet threat, NATO has grown to 28 members with increasingly diverse interests, political influences and values. Before Libya operations commenced in 2011 NATO engaged in combat operations only twice during the alliance's nearly 63 year history, in Kosovo in 1995 and Afghanistan beginning in 2001. The first hint of a new crisis that would spread through North Africa and the Middle East came in Tunisia.

In December 2010, the public self-immolation of Mohamad Bouazizi, protesting police brutality and corruption in Tunisia, led to a general revolt against the Tunisian government and triggered protests in Egypt, Sudan, Algeria, Yemen, Bahrain, Syria and Morocco. What would ultimately be known as the “Arab Spring” or “Arab Uprising” led to the overthrow of Tunisian President, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, in January 2011, and Egyptian President, Hosni Mubarak, in February 2011.

In mid February 2011, protests spread to Libya where hundreds of protesters gathered in the towns of Zintan and Bayda, calling for an end to the 42-year reign of the Qaddafi regime. Libyan security elements met these protests with lethal force. The government response led to more widespread protests with the opposition gaining control of Benghazi on 18 February and subsequently repelling government forces who attempted to recapture Libya’s second largest city over the next two days.

Protests in Libya spread west, to Tripoli, on 20 February 2011, triggering more violent responses from government forces and resulting in COL Muammar Qaddafi’s threat to “crush the revolt” on 22 February. Through February and March, pro-regime actions escalated into a pattern of air and ground attacks targeting crowds of civilian protesters. Calls for international community intervention to relieve the building humanitarian crisis resulted in UNSCR 1970, authorizing humanitarian assistance, an international arms embargo, and targeted sanctions on the Qaddafi regime.

#### Operation Odyssey Dawn

In response to the rapid breakdown of order in Libya, the American ambassador to Libya, Gene Cretz, ordered the Embassy in Tripoli closed on 25 February. At the direction of a Commander Joint Chiefs of Staff’s (CJCS) Execution Order, AFRICOM

established a Joint Task Force (JTF) on 3 March. ADM Samuel Locklear, Commander U.S. Naval Forces Europe and Commander U.S. Naval Forces Africa, assumed command of JTF Odyssey Dawn with Naval assets from U.S. 6<sup>th</sup> Fleet and air assets from the U.S. 3<sup>rd</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Air Forces.

Initial JTF-OD planning efforts focused only on preparation for a Non-Combatant Evacuation Operation (NEO) of American citizens from Libya, constraining assets and manning available to the fledgling JTF. The U.S. role in any coalition operation was expected to be limited. White house spokesman Jay Carney characterized U.S. military intervention in Libya as unlikely, but the Obama Administration did not rule out participation in an internationally administered No-Fly Zone (NFZ).<sup>3</sup>

While President Obama was down-playing the expected scale of any international intervention in Libya, French President Nicolas Sarkozy called for targeted strikes against the Qaddafi regime if his forces used chemical weapons or launched airstrikes against Libyan civilians.<sup>4</sup> The French President and British Prime Minister continued to push for creation of a no-fly zone over Libya, triggering increasing unease among many NATO nations. No-fly zone enforcement was opposed by EU foreign policy chief, Catherine Ashton, who said that “a no-fly zone would be highly risky and could end up killing large numbers of civilians.”<sup>5</sup>

Following a further escalation of Qaddafi regime attacks on civilians, the Arab League urged the United Nations to establish a maritime arms embargo and a no-fly zone over Libya. Following Muammar Qaddafi’s threats to burn Benghazi to the ground on 12 March, the UN issued UNSCR 1973, authorizing all necessary means to protect civilians in Libya from attack by regime forces:

UNSCR 1973 demanded an immediate cease-fire and authorized the establishment of a NFZ, enforcement of the arms embargo delineated in UNSCR 1970, and all necessary measures, short of foreign occupation, to protect civilians and civilian populated areas threatened by attack.<sup>6</sup>

Arab League support for the resolution and a failure to anticipate subsequent NATO action likely led to China and Russia abstaining from the vote on UN Security Council Resolution 1973, authorizing the no-fly zone. The language of UNSCR 1973 exceeded the authority initially sought by France and the UK. Additionally, Great Britain and France, with vital economic interests in Libya, may have countered the initial Obama Administration's reluctance to take a leading role in the operation by emphasizing U.S. interests in maintaining a strong NATO alliance and leveraging the long term UK support for NATO operations in Afghanistan.

President Obama announced coalition military operations implementing the provisions of UNSCR 1973 on 18 March. JTF Odyssey Dawn commenced offensive operations on 19 March. Even before the first mission launched, the Obama administration and AFRICOM Commander, Gen Carter Ham, planned for a quick transition of leadership of the operation to NATO.

Our role currently...under my authority as the commander [AFRICOM], is to make sure of two things—first, that we continue exercising our...mission that we have—protect civilians, and secondly, that we are prepared to transition responsibility for the mission to NATO quickly, effectively, and without disruption of the ongoing mission.<sup>7</sup>

NATO assumed responsibility for the arms embargo mission on 23 March and agreed to take over the entire mission on 26 March. NATO assumed overall responsibility for the entire operation, now called Operation Unified Protector (OUP), on 31 March, marking the disestablishment of Joint Task Force Odyssey Dawn.

## Operation Unified Protector

NATO's mission in Libya continued to expand in scope as Operation Odyssey Dawn transitioned to Operation Unified Protector. NATO Secretary General, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, characterized the coalition in terms that pushed the boundaries of the UN mandate.

NATO is enforcing an historic United Nations mandate to protect the people of Libya, and we will keep up the pressure until we meet our objectives: an end to all attacks against civilians, the withdrawal of all regime and paramilitary forces to bases, and full and unhindered humanitarian access to people in need across Libya.<sup>8</sup>

Controversial as an arms embargo and non-partisan no-fly zone enforcement mission to protect civilians, the perception developed that NATO was taking sides in an offensive operation to support the insurgents and destroy regime forces in the field.

The United Nations Security Council Resolution 1973 authorised the protection of civilians, but specifically ruled out the use of ground forces. The alliance stretched its mandate to the limit, in effect becoming the insurgents' air arm.<sup>9</sup>

The United States began withdrawing most air assets from the Libyan theater when Operation Odyssey Dawn officially ended in late March. It quickly became apparent that it was impossible to sustain NATO air operations without significant American support, most importantly air-to-air refueling (AAR). No suitable air bases near the Joint Operations Area (JOA) existed. Land based coalition aircraft based all over the western Mediterranean were between 400 miles to more than 1000 miles distant from their onstation areas. Combined non-U.S. NATO AAR assets and capabilities fell far short of the support required to conduct air operations under those conditions.

Responding to NATO Requests For Forces (RFF), less than two weeks after the platforms were redeployed out of theater, U.S. AAR, Intelligence Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR), Airborne Electronic Warfare (AEW), Combat Search and rescue (CSAR) and Strategic Airlift aircraft began flowing back into theater, recalled to support the NATO-led mission.

Nearly 50 American AAR aircraft, primarily KC-135s and KC-10s based in Spain began supporting the expanded operation. The refueling aircraft bases were four hours flying time from the refueling tracks, requiring eleven hour missions to provide three hours of onstation endurance. Participating refueling aircraft transferred nearly two million pounds of fuel daily to coalition aircraft, mostly paid for by the United States.

In addition to the lack of non-U.S. AAR resources in NATO, member nations possessed precious few ISR assets, which were required to monitor activities in the air and on the ground, and find and fix targets for strike aircraft. The limited French, Canadian and British airborne ISR capabilities did not come close to providing the required coverage, type and duration, of over two hundred thousand square miles in the Libyan operations area. American ISR platforms ultimately supporting Operation Unified Protector included Predator Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs), Joint Surveillance and Target Attack Radar System (JSTARS), P-3 Orion, EP-3 Aires, RC-135 and E-3 Sentry aircraft.

Underscoring the importance of the ISR mission, then-U.S. Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates, stated, "...the lack of investment by European members in intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance assets had hampered the mission in Libya."<sup>10</sup> He further emphasized that "The most advanced fighter aircraft are little use if allies do not

have the means to identify, process and strike targets as part of an integrated campaign.”<sup>11</sup>

The primary non-U.S. provided capabilities available in any meaningful numbers were in the areas of offensive and defensive counter air (OCA/DCA) and air-to-ground strike. None of these countries or aircraft, however, possessed the capability to suppress or defeat enemy air defenses (SEAD/DEAD)<sup>12</sup>, another crucial requirement for any air mission conducted in an integrated air defense (IADS) environment like Libya. As a result, against the desires of the Obama administration, U.S. Navy and Air Force offensive tactical aircraft deployed to support the operation, and another critical NATO capability deficiency was exposed.

NATO justified military intervention in Libya from the beginning as a mission to protect innocent civilians from attack. UNSCR 1973, based on the UN’s so-called “Responsibility to Protect” (R2P), provided the authority for, and legitimacy of the NATO mission. Responsibility to protect is a controversial concept in many UN and NATO nations. Often, support of R2P must in conjunction with other interests, but any intervention potentially violates the critical concept of respect for and recognition of national sovereignty, which is of particular interest for China and Russia. Responsibility to protect also suffers from the perception of unequal application. Why intervene in Libya and not in Syria, Yemen, Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda or Sudan?

The fragile alliance to pursue the NATO mission supporting the UN’s responsibility to protect encountered resistance from the start. Following Operation Odyssey Dawn, the Obama administration adamantly insisted on leading from behind in Libya, both diplomatically and militarily. The U.S. administration agreed to lead the initial



weeks of the operation because no other country was yet able to provide the required planning and command and control capabilities. Additionally, American and coalition planners did not expect the Qadaffi regime to last more than a few weeks.

Also, with two American-led wars continuing in the Middle East, the Obama administration wanted to keep a low profile in Libya, both to establish legitimacy as a multi-lateral mission, and for the U.S. domestic audience, who largely saw little reason for any American military involvement in the conflict, especially given the level of U.S. military commitments elsewhere. It was a delicate balancing act, perpetuating the impression that the United States was strictly playing a supporting role in the operation while a vast majority of the aircraft and funding came from the United States.

France and Great Britain provided significant material and planning support to the NATO operation while concurrently pursuing national level missions in the Libyan theater. Many other member nations, however, provided less robust support in a “worrying trend of member countries' taking an increasingly a la carte approach to their alliance responsibilities.”<sup>13</sup> Only 14 of 28 NATO nations provided any material support, and only eight flew strike sorties.

Most damaging and emblematic of a long-term divergence of interests in NATO was Germany's opposition to the mission in Libya.

...Germany marked a new low when it followed its refusal to back Resolution 1973 with a withdrawal of all practical support for NATO's mission, even jeopardising the early stages of the campaign by pulling its crews out of the alliance's airborne warning and control aircraft.<sup>14</sup>

Former German foreign minister, Joschka Fischer called it the “biggest foreign policy debacle in the Federal Republic's history.”<sup>15</sup> Poland also refused to support the mission, characterizing NATO's involvement as “motivated by oil.”<sup>16</sup> Interestingly, both

Germany and Poland provided staff officers to the Combined Air and Space Operations Center in Italy supporting planning and execution of NATO and coalition air operations.

The lack of unity between Germany and other NATO member nations can be explained by Germany's growing economic relationship with Russia. Western Europe's reliance on Russian oil and natural gas is especially evident in Germany. Germany imports almost forty percent of its gas and twenty percent of its oil from Russia.

Russia's emergence as a more assertive and confident economic and political actor has coincided with another important regional trend: the intensification of economic and political ties between Germany and Russia, particularly in the energy field.<sup>17</sup>

Diplomatic feuding between Moscow and Kiev, and political instability and corruption within Ukraine led to threats of Russian gas supply disruptions through the Ukrainian pipeline to Europe. To address this problem Germany committed to making a large investment to ensure energy supply stability from Russia, agreeing to largely fund the Nord Stream offshore pipeline in the Baltic Sea, bypassing the Ukrainian pipeline.

For years after reunification Germany and NATO were largely unified on alliance policies in Europe. During the 1990s the United States and Germany spearheaded efforts on NATO expansion.

...in the 1990s Germany took the lead in forging a European consensus behind NATO enlargement to Central Europe. Indeed NATO enlargement to Central Europe was largely a U.S.-German project.

Now Germany's close economic ties with Russia appear to be influencing their position on issues such as NATO expansion and ballistic missile defense in Europe. Today Germany opposes the American proposal to accelerate the admission of Ukraine and Georgia to NATO. German government spokesman, Thomas Steg, said that "... the

time was not yet ripe for Georgia and Ukraine to join NATO.”<sup>18</sup> This is causing concern among other NATO nations.

Germany has strong economic and political interests in maintaining stable relations with Russia. Thus, Berlin is going to react cautiously to proposals that could lead to deterioration of relations with Moscow. This will make the pursuit of coherent transatlantic policy toward Russia much more difficult in the future.

The nature of the Germany-Russia relationship affects more than future transatlantic policy directly aimed at Russia. The close economic ties between the two countries make it unlikely that, in the future, Germany will support any potential NATO policies or actions contrary to the interests of the Russian government.

Another source of friction within the NATO alliance during Operation Unified Protector was a lack of political support for offensive strikes, even among the few nations actually flying those missions. With only eight nations providing crews and aircraft to enforce the arms embargo, no-fly zone and R2P missions, there was little tolerance for the loss of use of any of those assets, even for a short period of time. Yet, due to political sensitivities, numerous participating nations periodically denied requests for their aircraft throughout the operation.

In May, Norway threatened to recall its F-16 aircraft deployed to fly in Libya. While in support of the desire to protect civilians from attack by regime forces, several Northern European nations questioned the morality of bombing in an environment where it was difficult to distinguish combatants from non-combatants. Many NATO member governments were also uneasy with the now obvious military and political objective of removing Gaddafi from power, in other words regime change. This struck many as hypocrisy, as many of these governments criticized the U.S.-led coalition in Iraq for identifying regime change as an objective.

Politicians from minority Party the Socialist Left (SV) initially supported the campaign, but later called for a debate about Norway's bombing dilemma following joint statements by David Cameron, Barack Obama, and Nicolas Sarkozy advocating Gaddafi's removal.<sup>19</sup>

Making the situation even more difficult for many European nations, operational security (opsec) was very poor, as is often the case in many NATO-UN missions. The need to share information among the many nations making up the coalition required loosening of typical restrictions on the dissemination of sensitive material. In some cases, reports surfaced of Qaddafi regime forces possessing NATO operational and tactical briefs.

The poor opsec threatened coalition cohesion on numerous occasions through May and June, consistently compromising the element of surprise and national origin of strike aircraft operating over Libya. During the lengthy transit to the Libyan operational area coalition aircraft flew under positive control of civilian air traffic control agencies. Both rebel and regime forces were able to monitor the ATC system and were therefore forewarned about coalition aircraft flying into Libyan airspace. Also, the aircraft call signs used during transit identified national origin and aircraft type.

On numerous occasions NATO strikes reportedly resulted in civilian casualties. Information available to regime forces and the international press from ATC data identified both type aircraft and national origin. Of little consolation was the assertion by the NATO commander of Operation Unified Protector, Canadian Lt Gen Charles Bouchard, that NATO, not any individual nation, exercised release authority over all munitions employed in Libya. "All ordnance is NATO ordnance."<sup>20</sup>

Popular opposition to these missions already presented a political challenge to coalition member governments. The political pressure increased significantly when

reports surfaced that one of their aircraft was responsible for civilian deaths in Libya. On numerous occasions following one of these incidents, coalition members pulled their aircraft out of the operation for several days at a time, often leaving the Combined Forces Air Component Commander unable to man all required sorties for those days. A combination of the political pressure related to the bombing issue, and fiscal pressure resulting from the unexpected duration of the mission led to Norway pulling nearly half of their participating aircraft out of the theater in June.

This continuing political disunity among Unified Protector participants frequently created significant challenges to the selection and approval of targets. On numerous occasions during June and July, due to the objections of several national representatives, the strike planners were not provided with any targets at all. Even when approved targets were provided, they were frequently not consistent with the published Commander's Intent. The myth of the smoothly running NATO operation was repeatedly belied by a difficulty in approving targets and a disconnect between strategic guidance and the few targets to survive the selection process.

Also in June, Italy threatened the cohesion of the NATO alliance when Italian foreign minister Franco Frattini, while speaking to an Italian parliamentary committee, unexpectedly and unilaterally called for a bombing pause.

The Italian foreign minister, Franco Frattini, had suggested that NATO's credibility was at risk after a number of civilian casualties in air raids, but his comments were given short shrift in London and Paris, where both governments instead urged an intensification of pressure on Muammar Gaddafi...<sup>21</sup>

Mr. Frattini further called for continuing peace talks and "ever more detailed information on the results of the campaign that's no closer to success than when it began in mid-March."<sup>22</sup> France and Britain immediately rejected Mr. Frattini's proposal,

but cracks in the NATO alliance in Libya were apparently growing. Italy's public separation from NATO's unified front was even more problematic as the Joint Task Force Headquarters, Combined Air and Space Operations Center and most strike aircraft bases were located in Italy.

In the midst of this friction, a widening gap emerged between the public perception of the performance of the coalition and the institutional and political realities within the alliance. Many in the media and in the public characterized NATO's mission in Libya as a great success and a model for future multi-lateral action, in spite of the unexpectedly considerable cost, long duration and resulting political friction. Because NATO's military intervention supported a popular uprising, removed a dictator from power and was legitimized by a UN Security Council Resolution, it was considered a success.

The very fact that, as a consequence of UNSCR 1973, NATO actions led to the overthrow of the leader of a sovereign nation now make it highly unlikely that the UN Security Council will ever pass a similar resolution. China and Russia likely did not expect passage of UNSCR 1973 to result in NATO's establishment of a no-fly zone in Libya and eventual direct support to the anti-regime forces facilitating regime change. Both China and Russia are historically reluctant to support any UN Security Council Resolution that violates another nation's sovereignty and are very unlikely to abstain on any future Chapter VII vote similarly authorizing or legitimizing military action.

Additionally, Libya was a poor choice of location for NATO to rest its military and post-hostility operations reputation. Libya is a country with little or no collective national

identity and an entrenched culture of regionalism, tribalism and factionalism resulting in a volatile political environment and a high probability of future violence or even civil war.

Looking forward, possibly the most critical weakness in the alliance exposed by NATO operations in Libya is the gap between NATO's future ambitions and member nations' increasing fiscal limitations. In response to shrinking budgets and the rising cost of military operations NATO member nations, over the past ten years, have mostly abandoned the goal of maintaining full spectrum military capabilities, deciding instead to manage complementary or shared specialization. The result is a dependence on the NATO alliance to provide security through collective capabilities. The obvious risk being that an important security interest for one alliance member may not be sufficiently important to others. Even with shared interest, unity on a military course of action may not exist.

Within the new philosophy of collective capabilities only Britain and France intended on maintaining a near full spectrum military. The spiraling costs of operations in Libya and Afghanistan have threatened the sustainability of this force for both nations. In September France announced defense spending cuts of three percent for next year and additional cuts over the next three years, reversing a nearly ten year trend of increased spending. Much more damaging to the alliance, in October, 2010 the United Kingdom announced an eight percent cut in defense spending over the next four years,<sup>23</sup> resulting in the eventual grounding of the Harrier jets and decommissioning of the HMS Ark Royal. As a result Great Britain will now have no aircraft carrier capability until at least 2019.<sup>24</sup>

Budget cuts in other NATO member nations are more severe and jeopardize the depth of the collective capabilities strategy. Since September 11, 2001 the 28 NATO members have cut defense spending 15 percent, with more cuts announced for the future.<sup>25</sup> At the same time NATO has stated its intention of significantly increasing European member capabilities in the areas of strategic lift, air-to-air refueling, intelligence surveillance and reconnaissance and electronic warfare.

Additionally, NATO's Lisbon Summit Declaration in 2010 promised a more ambitious expansion of NATO's military role and enhanced capabilities. In Lisbon NATO committed to a ballistic missile defense capability, ideally in conjunction with Russia, deciding to:

develop the capability to defend our populations and territories against ballistic missile attack as a core element of our collective defence, which contributes to the indivisible security of the Alliance. We will actively seek cooperation on missile defence with Russia and other Euro-Atlantic partners.<sup>26</sup>

NATO's Multiple Futures Project (MFP) in 2009 suggests even more roles for the alliance over the next 20 years. The MFP recommended:

Adapt NATO's force structure and planning processes to emphasise non-combat missions, such as humanitarian relief, maritime security, infrastructure protection and support for multinational responses to natural disasters.<sup>27</sup>

With defense budgets for individual member nations and NATO as a whole shrinking for the foreseeable future, it is highly unlikely that these desired capability enhancements can be achieved. Additionally, The United Nations and numerous NGOs provide many of the stability and reconstruction operation functions that NATO's multiple Futures Project recommends. NATO operations in Libya made it readily apparent that all but the most limited future alliance military operations will require



considerable U.S. support. Tactical aircraft, no matter how advanced or numerous, cannot perform their mission without AAR support for operational reach, electronic warfare support for suppression of enemy air defense, and ISR support for target generation and planning.

AAR, EW and ISR are all functions that only the United States possesses in adequate numbers for sustained military operations. NATO needs to determine what fundamental capabilities are required to counter future threats and protect members' vital or important national interests.

### Recommendations

As a result of weaknesses exposed by operations in Libya, NATO needs to make some hard choices in order to ensure their relevance and viability as a capable security and defense alliance in the future. Participating nations should base their decisions on the fiscal realities and political climate that currently exist and are likely to persist into the foreseeable future. Looking forward, the structure of NATO needs to address the issues of unequal financial commitment, varying political will and gaps in critical capabilities for European members.

A model for pooling resources and ensuring the availability of multi-lateral full spectrum capability is the integrated multi-national NATO E-3A AWACS program. These NATO AWACS aircraft are financed across the alliance's membership and are flown and maintained by multi-national crews. For other combat functions, the current NATO strategy of national combat capability specialization, where a NATO nation gives up full spectrum capability, instead focusing on a specific support mission, leaves the

alliance vulnerable to a member withholding a critical capability due to divergent interests or political differences with other member nations.

The integrated multi-national approach used in the E-3A program, applied to other critical capabilities, may help ensure that NATO possesses an affordable sustained power projection capability into the future. A similar NATO owned and multi-nationally crewed approach can be applied to ISR platforms (E-8 JSTARS, P-3/8, RC-135 variant, UAVs), air-to-air refueling (KC-130, KC-135, KC-10, KC-767), combat search and rescue (HH-60) and strategic airlift (C-130, C-17).

A hybrid of the NATO AWACS model and the U.S. Air Expeditionary Wing (AEW) can achieve the same results applied to tactical capabilities such as air superiority (F-15A/C, F-16, F-18, F-35, EFA, Grippen, Tornado, Rafale), air interdiction and close air support (F-16, F-18C/E/F, AV-8B, Tornado, Rafale), and electronic warfare (EA-6B, EA18G). These NATO expeditionary wings, applying the same integrated multi-national concept, would be funded by NATO and internationally crewed.

Applying the multi-national model to the funding and operation of these mission areas would help to ensure availability of full spectrum air capability when needed. These NATO owned assets would likely reduce overall expense due to shared costs and usage reducing total aircraft required. NATO ownership would also ensure a more equitable financial commitment across member nations. This shared capability concept would also allow national governments to withhold support due to political concerns without the loss of an asset or capability to NATO.

The NATO AWACS approach can be similarly applied to maritime capabilities and assets. A variation on the Standing NATO Maritime Group (SNMG-1/2) would

provide the same efficiencies to critical maritime capabilities such as anti-submarine warfare (ASW), ballistic missile defense (BMD) and power projection provided by “big deck” aircraft carriers. France and the UK are already exploring this concept with their plans for a jointly operated aircraft carrier.

Fiscal limitations require further hard choices. NATO’s desire to expand their role to include nation building and post conflict reconstruction in an environment of rapidly shrinking budgets is unrealistic. A more effective approach may be a permanent NATO liaison with the United Nations to coordinate the transition and the reconstruction, stability and humanitarian assistance/ disaster relief functions that the UN already serves. NATO would only need to participate directly if they possess a capability that the UN needs and lacks, in which case funding options can spread the cost out more equitably.

### Conclusion

NATO operations in Libya, though considered a success by many, highlighted significant weaknesses in the alliance’s ability to execute even a small air campaign against a technically inferior adversary. Operation Unified Protector also exposed a disparity in the ability and willingness of NATO members to contribute, a divergence in interests for member nations and a growing capabilities gap. Additionally, in today’s challenging fiscal environment, NATO’s ability to address these weaknesses and implement the fixes are significantly reduced.

NATO’s decision to get involved in an internal conflict, lack of clear objectives and requirement for significant logistics and mission support left the alliance poorly situated to achieve a positive mission outcome. NATO’s subsequent pursuit of regime

change as a required endstate threatened to break up the already fragile coalition. The alliances material and capabilities shortfalls call into question NATO's viability in any future conflict. The need to address the shortfalls while concurrently seeking a greater role in post conflict reconstruction, HA/DR and stability operations are unrealistic in a constrained fiscal environment.

It is clear that NATO has considerable hurdles to achieving full spectrum military viability in the future. By concentrating on the strengths of the alliance and combining resources to fill capability and asset gaps, these hurdles are not insurmountable. In spite of their problems, the NATO alliance is the only military alliance in the world that is able to act in such a wide range of circumstances, and with the assistance of the United States, more equitable participation and more efficient organization of their core competencies in Europe NATO should be capable of meeting nearly any foreseeable military challenge for many years to come.

## Endnotes

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

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